

# NECRONOMICON

NO.1

WINTER  
93  
\$2.00



**VIPCO INTERVIEW**  
WINTER BRIDES SPECIAL  
THE LIVING DEAD AT THE  
MANCHESTER MORGUE  
**TRACI LORDS**  
SHERLOCK HOLMES, U.N.C.L.E.  
FU MANCHU, BAVA, ROLLIN,  
*and FRANCO!*



MIRACLE FILMS presents

RAYMOND LOVELOCK • ARTHUR KENNEDY • CHRISTINE GALBO in

# THE LIVING DEAD AT THE MANCHESTER MORGUE

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# NECRONOMICON

Welcome to issue 1 of *Necronomicon*. What - yet another horror mag? I hear you cry.

Well, yes, it is, and I make no apologies for that, or for entering an already cluttered arena. Whilst most new publications vainly promise "something different" and "original", I make no such claims - only that neglected, interesting and above all, entertaining *things* will find their way between these pages.

I emphasise *things* because this is what *Necronomicon* is about. There are a plethora of other worthy magazines which cover literature, art, soundtracks and movie spin-offs, but this magazine is purely devoted to the celluloid canon - the most expressive and stimulating image of all.

That's not to say that diversity isn't the name of the game here. I hope you'll agree that this first issue features an eclectic gathering, ranging from the out and out horror of *The Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue*, to the stylised chills of *Killerz Of Fu Manchu*, the pure exploitation of *Love Bites* and the entertaining charm and escapism of *UNCLE'S The Spy In The Green Hat*.

Indeed, by including regular features on the likes of *Fu Manchu*, *U.N.C.L.E.* and *Sherlock Holmes*, with a similar column for giallo/thriller style films also planned, I hope that *Necronomicon* really can shed narrow, "pure" horror conceptions to extend its boundaries in favour of wider, equally engrossing frontiers.

Also, by aiming for a predominantly retrospective approach, *Necronomicon* will remain free of current genre pressures to include coverage of conveyor-belt titles such as *Children 4* and *Friday The 13th Part 9* just by virtue of the fact that they are newly released.

Instead, surely more rewarding to delve into past treasures from the likes of Hammer, Reisz, Franco *et al*, whilst striking a balance with coverage of only the most innovative genre releases.

As such, you can expect to see coverage of thought-provoking films such as *The Sect*, *Trauma* and the raucous Gothic cinema with Coppola's *Dracula* amongst the vanguard.

I'd also welcome feedback from the

most important people of all - you, the readers. Although I hope I've unearthed a varied selection of films and explored some of the more engaging themes within them, I'd very much like your response, be it positive, critical or whatever. What do you like, what don't you like, how can it be improved, what would you like to see in it?

As such, expect a letters page in issue 2!!

I'm also interested in hearing from any would-be contributors - not always easy to find! If you've got firm ideas, or even just the germ of something potentially interesting, then just drop me a line.

Finally, why *Necronomicon*? Well, I'm not about to embark on some great H.P. Lovecraft crusade but of all horror writers, he more than most, inhabits the Gothic milieu which can prove so atmospheric, whilst also embracing new ideas and hinting at a far greater intelligence at work as yet undiscovered.

To this end, Lovecraft wrote that, "All my stories unconnected as they may be, are based on fundamental lore or legend, that the world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practicing black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live outside over ready to take possession of this earth again."

The subtlety in his writing is also akin to that shown by many of the finer exponents of horror cinema such as Mario Bava, Terence Fisher and Michele Soavi. As Lovecraft elucidates, "I am not much troubled by the suspicion that a chancel vault exists below an immemorably ancient castle, or that a certain very old man has taken part in a demonic convulse fifty years ago. I crave the ethereal, the remote, the shadowy and the doubtful."

*Necronomicon* craves the same.

Best Wishes



Andy Black (January 1993)

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Thanks to... Caroline "Babe" Black, John Gullidge, Steve Midwinter, Steve G, Nick Wilson (Thurs), Mike Lee at Vipoo, Dave Hughes, Mark Cohen, David Cottle, Richard Connors for some great photos, Carolyn Krumholz, Paula at UDO, John Gregary, Arena Productions, Hammer Films, S&W Films, Flamingo Productions, Ful Films, Muscle Films, Morgana Films, George Jack Inc./Dorcas Productions, Katsu Productions, David Film Media/International General/official and private photographs collections. Finally thanks to Paul "God" McGrath for superb debuting and Dallas Ashmore for inspirational guest - "just singing and dancing in the rain!"

Published quarterly by Andy Black from 15 Jubilee Road, Newton Abbot, Devon. TQ22 1LB.

Printed by UDO, Exeter.

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# CURSE OF THE DEAD

*It's time to unearth one of Mario Bava's most neglected Gothic classics, as the secular world collides with ancient superstition and ignorance.*

I will start with a confession. I am a huge Mario Bava fan. For me, no one can quite equal his skill for overcoming diatry plots by imbuing each individual film with a unique sense of style and mood. His camera will fix upon the most prosaic of images and yet through lighting and dramatic movement, produce a masterpiece of cinema. To Bava, the camera is most definitely a tool, to be wielded as extravagantly or as delicately as an artist would a brush: only his carvers is the celluloid world of magic, mystery and suspense, his colours the diverse nuances and emotions within the human soul.

His influence upon the whole of the Italian horror / giallo cinema, from the exuberant bedazzlement of Argento to the subtle frissons produced by Avati, is undeniable, even extending across the water to such bewilderingly popular fodder as *Friday The 13th* (1980) - remember the "spared" lovers were also around in Bava's *Twist of the Death Horse* (1972).

Well, now that I've raved my colours to the mast so to speak, one thing I can guarantee is that you will see plenty of the man in future issues of *Necronomicon*!

Anyway, enough of the eulogising and on with the film. Bava's little-discussed *Curse of the Dead* represents him at his most deliciously gothic best. Like the later *Baron Blood* (1975), *Curse* charts the intrusion of secular rationale into a hitherto closed village community, riddled with "superstition and ignorance".

The film starts with the disquieting image of a woman falling from a window to become impaled on spiked railings below, accompanied by a child's cries/laugh. The voice of reason as embodied by Dr. Eswei (Giacomo Rossi-Stuart), is then summoned to perform an autopsy on the victim by police -

**"When a place is as bad as this it's been cursed."**

Inspector Kruger, drafted in on the case from a neighbouring town.

For some unaccountable reason, Eswei then discovers a coin placed on the victim's heart and delves deeper into the mysterious villa Graps - "when a place is as bad as this it's been cursed", he is warned.

It transpires that a number of violent deaths have plagued the village recently. Eswei also finds a note from the dead woman indicating she had believed there to be a "ring of murder" operating in the community and that she feared she would be next.

Armed with this cautionary information, Eswei, with the help of Marcia - (giallo favourite Erica Blanc), then discovers that the ghostly apparition of a young girl, Melissa, is the precursor to each victim's death. Further investigations reveal Melissa to have been the victim of some local village revelry years before when she was trampled by horses whilst running after a ball - the misbehaved locals oblivious to the tragedy until her eventual death - signalled from the bell-tower whose admonishing peals reverberated as if playing a requiem for the moribund child lying there.

Eswei also learns that Melissa is the offspring of the arcane Baroness Graps (Gianna Vivaldi), mistress of the "cursed" villa Graps, and who has been using her own spiritualist powers through the body of Melissa, as a conduit to gain her own vicious revenge upon those she deems responsible for

her daughter's death.

It is the continual deceit and suspicion of the isolated populace which Eswei discovers most difficult to surmount. Even the doctor's first appearance, as he enters the local public house, is indicative of the later indifference he will face as he is met by uniform silence and hostile stares by the regulars.

The villagers are also appalled by his plans to perform an autopsy, regarding it as heresy and "against nature", later attacking him in the street for "proclaiming dead bodies".

Besides the tenderness from the villagers, Bava also has to challenge the resident witch, Ruth (Fabienne Dak), whose own incantations and medieval poisons are taken in preference to the modern cures offered by the doctor.

As such, he finds the inn-keeper's ailing daughter being drained of blood by the witch's supposedly remedial leech-line.

Permeating these intransigent feelings of mistrust and superstition are Bava's vast array of stylistic devices which lend a considerable atmospheric charge to the proceedings. The village itself is clearly established as an unenviable place during the opening scenes when a coffin is carried through the narrow streets. Low angled shots of towering granite structures, together with a spartan landscape save for the twisted branches of decaying trees, paint a barren picture with Eswei's horse-drawn carriage speedily vacating the area as if in sympathy with the frightened coachman in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Symbolically, Eswei's initial scalpel incision during the autopsy heralds the first of Bava's hallucinatory dream images - a rapidly zooming camera spiralling round a graveyard, then revealed to be a point-of-view shot from a child (Melissa?), playing on a swing.

As incandescent light then bathes the





night landscape as the ghostly face of Melissa materialises at a window, all under the frightened gaze of the innkeeper's daughter. The intensity increases as we zoom into Melissa's face before the entranced victim impales herself on a candelabra spike - all the while watched by Melissa's vengeful stare.

Bava later heightens the tension as the wind howls fiercely through the churchyard and into the funeral parlour - a child's ball bouncing over the body laid to rest there only for child-like laughter to pierce the quiet as the funeral shroud ominously drops to the floor.

Bells toll for no apparent reason, mysterious lights shine in the cemetery where Eswei also finds the body of the murdered Inspector Kruger, and ethereal mists cloak the village, sweeping through the streets with swirling menace.

It is in the villa Gneps however, that Bava really begins to adeptly turn the screw, throwing in further confusion with which to compound Eswei and the pointed Monica. There are repeated shots of the villa's spiral staircase, its twisting, mazy contours mirroring the labyrinth-like mystery which is gradually unfolding before our eyes, whilst our glimpses of the ubiquitous Baroness are only from behind ornamented baroque panelling and the profusion of cobwebbed interiors that dominate.

A close-up of a painting in a secret room establishes the maternal relationship between the Baroness and Melissa, whilst shots of Eswei chasing after Monica are gradually revealed to be

continually "looping" sequences until Eswei finally catches the figure in front only for it to be uncovered as himself.

The denouement sees Monica flee - in horror at learning that she too is a daughter of the Baroness, while Melissa's features fade into the Baroness's stony face at a mirror - a judicious shot to provide ample comment on the Baroness and her vile use of Melissa as an instrument of retribution. As the embryonic stirrings of childhood, together with oedipal angst, are evoked by a welter of dolls cascading to the floor, Monica discovers her "own" grave.

Almost simultaneously, Ruth vents her own homicidal rage upon the Baroness, whom she kills in order to avenge the earlier death of her lover, Karl - another to previously die at the hands of Melissa but the mind and wishes of the Baroness.

Whilst the ending does rather peter out after the accelerating tension of the film's mystery is gradually unraveled, Bava does succeed in infusing the film with enough visual flair to counter any lack of narrative cohesion, which is never one of his, or Italian cinema's most celebrated attributes in the final analysis.

*Curse of the Dead* has been described as Bava's "last great gothic" which is probably a fair assessment, although there are flourishes of his undoubted talent in the later films *Hei! Hei! For A Honey Moon*, *Twist of the Death Noose* and *Baron Blood*.

Bava's work after this has often been criticised for a lazy reliance on the zoom lens as is a certain Mr. Jess Franco,

but fortunately not enough to detract from the excellent visual thrills he demonstrates here, along with his enviable ability to merge gothic regalia successfully with authentic scenes of enhanced tension.

**"admonishing  
peals  
reverberated  
as if playing  
a requiem for  
the moribund  
child."**

Interestingly enough, critic Ernest Harris sought to compare Bava's film with Carl Dreyer's seminal *Vampyr* (1932) - it does encapsulate a similar dream-like quality, whilst also noting Bava's use of an evil little girl which prefigures that of Federico Fellini's anthology piece, *Toby Dammit* "by some 2 years".

It appears that maestro Bava can inspire the very best of them!



# BRIDES OF DRACULA

*Christopher Lee may be missing but not Hammer's customary gusto and vampiric verve as the undead rise once more.*

Under the paternal guiding hand of director Terence Fisher, *Brides of Dracula* eclipses Christopher Lee's absence from the arch vampire role through a combination of heightened gothic atmosphere, overt sexuality and by accentuating hitherto latent Freudian symbolism - all complemented by Hammer's considerable attention to period detail.

Set in the late 19th century, *Dracula* is timely dead and buried, but not so his disciples, who perpetuate his parasitic influence via the pernicious figure of Baron Meinster (David Peel), held in chained captivity by his world-weary mother, Baroness Meinster (Marita Hunt).

Having lured with the affections of a new and impressionable schoolteacher, Marianne (Yvonne Monlaur), he implores her to release him which she obliges, the catalyst for a series of vampire murders to occur. Only the appearance of Professor Van Helsing (Peter Cushing), can prevent Marianne's doomed whirlwind marriage to Baron Meinster as Helsing is compelled to destroy the predatory tend during a gripping climax.

*Brides of Dracula*, intelligently seeks to progress the unfettered sensuality which was so stridently displayed in Christopher Lee's portrayal of the vampire count in Hammer's seminal *Dracula* in 1958.

The inherent eroticism implied with the vampires deadly caress and his subsequent milking of the primal bodily fluid are given added poignancy when set against the film's background of oppressive Freudian influences.

Meinster's first victim (on-screen) is his mother - drained of her life-blood in an explicit display of oedipal - inspired anger.

The physical manacles which restrain Meinster contrast vividly with the mental shackles Marianne imposes upon her awakening emotions - the

suppressed sexuality which Meinster's bile arouses in dramatic fashion with Greta (Andrea Melly) - despite her pellicur, a more vibrant and alluring creature in vampirism, consumed with a passion never apparent during her mortal life.

Fisher easily gets to work on the gothic rituals inherent in the setting, scrutinising the ornate interiors of the Meinster mansion - velvet curtains concealing the ancestral coffins, and exploring spatial compositions within frames effectively as when the Baroness advances menacingly upon the unsuspecting Helsing (viewed in long-shot), whilst the Baron's threatening presence simultaneously cloaks him in close-up.

The film's most celebrated sequence however, occurs at night as the servant Greta (Freda Jackson) caws at a fresh grave, imploring its occupant to arise with almost salacious desire as the earth heaves open and an outstretched hand bursts into view, followed by the chalk-white vampire held within.

Equally unsettling are the limorous horses which are left to "guard" Greta's coffin - their tears well-founded as Meinster appears and in the ensuing baffle with Helsing, sets fire to the barn, leading to an exaggerated climax as Cushing destroys Meinster by pouncing upon the arms of a windmill in order to cast the shadow of a cross onto the ground,

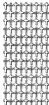
and so reducing the helpless vampire to dust.

Other incidental details range from character actor Miles Maleson's engaging cameo as a hypochondriac doctor and the contrasting trauma experienced by one distraught father whilst imploring the local priest to allow his daughter the sanctuary of a church burial despite her "unholy" vampiric death.

The superstition Fisher embraces here is cast aside in the film's most controversial scene as Helsing is vampirised - only to later cauterise the wound with a hot iron to survive. Although an original concept, the comparative ease of Helsing's recovery also serves to dilute the hitherto unrenowned "potency" of the vampire as vampire lore is itself revoked.

Some watched bats on patently obvious wires, and the rather glaring symbolism of a girls school juxtaposed with vampires - a veritable bloodbank of lambs to the slaughter also detracts from an otherwise impressive offering.

While not quite recapturing the authenticity of their original *Dracula*, *Brides of Dracula* remains one of Hammer's more notable forays with its cogent interpolation of emerging sexuality and vampire allure, together with the pious choral music motif which elevates the crusading Van Helsing to his most impressive and revered zenith.



# THE BLOOD SPLATTERED BRIDE

*"The good ones are those who are content to dream what the wicked actually practice." - Plato.*

The product of the lowered mind of Spanish director Vicente Aranda, *The Blood Splattered Bride* gathers up the disparate strands of his previous picture *Las Cruces* (1972) in uniting lesbian couplings with psycho-sexual angst, whilst also appropriating similar elements from Hammer's sporadically interesting *Kenstein* film trilogy, in turn, based on Sheridan Le Fanu's terrible novel, *Carmilla*.

Although heavily cut in both the UK and American versions, the film does still carry a powerful erotic charge, centring on the emotional pressures experienced by two newly-weds, Susan (Maribel Martín) and her husband (Simon Andreu).

It is the vulnerable Susan who is ripe for falling under the hypnotic gaze and manipulative nature of a 200 years old vampire, Carmilla/Mircalla (Alexandre Bastedo).

From the very beginning, with a disturbing and hallucinatory image unfolding before our eyes as Susan, in a hotel room and still dressed in her virginal white bridal gown, is attacked by a black-clad assailant leaping out of her wardrobe, and who proceeds to disrobe her before then caressing her naked flesh. As her husband enters the room we find Susan now sat on the bed, dressed and apparently unharmed - was it all a dream? Maybe so, but she still wants to move hotels and her sexual inhibitions have already paradoxically been "exposed" and laid bare for all to see.

With Susan's delicate, chastened character now clearly established, her husband's relative insensitivity towards his wife's fragility appears all the more flagrant. His first attempts at intimacy with Susan founder as he clumsily rips her bra, also tearing her dress - his

animalistic behaviour mirroring that of the rapist (husband ?) in Susan's earlier dream/nightmare.

His waking remark to Susan the next day, "Sweet morning - you lived through your wedding night" assuming ironic importance given the context here.

The couple's apparent incompatibility is further emphasised in a later scene as Susan - again clad in white, is encircled by her predatory husband as she awakes in a dove cage. The picturesque framing of her during the sequence, when contrasted with that of her husband - clad in black and glimpsed only from behind the mesh cage as if imprisoned, reinforces the covenantal divide which separates them both emotional and stylistic terms.

Contrast this with Susan's fanciful torchlight tour of a darkened cellar where she revels in the discovery of a painting featuring Mircalla/Kenstein, and her frequent glimpses of a mysterious snowy-white figure on a bridge (also Mircalla), and you begin to discover who Susan feels the greater affinity for.

Aranda's hypnotic sequences then offer us a mesmerising introduction into the vampire's world as tilted camera angles and blinding, flashing light heralds Mircalla's spectral emergence. Susan is given a dagger before "sealing the pact with a kiss" as the more sanguinary and erotic vampire motifs are integrated into the film.

The next morning, some perfunctory Jungian theorising is used to explain Susan's "dream", her husband's diagnoses that "in dreams, the subconscious selects the objects which are normally prohibited in a person's moral or aesthetic upbringing" still reverberates as Susan concludes with extracts from Jung's work on "inherited dreams" and the "Judea Complex", by explaining,

"It is common to dream about loved ones" whilst the loss of virginity can be "desirable and abhorrent at the same time."

Mircalla's nightly visitations persist however, with increasing intensity as she leads Susan to stand over the sleeping husband, stabbing him repeatedly before then butchering the prone body - both becoming bathed in blood.

Again on awakening, Susan finds it has all been just a "dream". Mircalla's reappearance is brisk - quite literally a stunning moment in surreal horror cinema as the husband discovers a snorkel sticking out of the sand, whilst out walking on the beach!

Upon closer inspection he discovers a body which he uneasily as the naked form of Mircalla, miraculously still alive and who he takes back to the house.

Having introduced herself as Carmilla, she then entices Susan to attack her husband with the aforementioned dagger, before fleeing.

Now at the Kenstein crypt, they find a headstone marked "Mircalla", whereupon Susan's vampire companion embarks on a perverse "de-marriage" ceremony - spewing forth the anti-male invectives that, "he has pierced your flesh to humiliate you", "he has spat inside your body to enslave you", before asking Susan to repeat the rites in a feminine inversion of the male-dominated ceremony, culminating with Mircalla's graphic seduction of Susan - the final act of defilement on the sexual union of marriage.

The bloodthirsty conclusion sees both slain by the distraught husband as Aranda clings all too easily to a "male anxiety in the face of predatory female dominance" scenario as reinforced by the numerous lesbian couplings - the onyx vampire encounters a continual reminder of Aranda's evident visual alien.



# BRIDES OF FU MANCHU

*"The world will hear from me again".*



It is ironic that Fu Manchu's sinister warning also served to torment his British creator, author Sax Rohmer, who, whilst owing his fame and success to the oriental fiend, also found his other notable terror tales such as *"The Valley of the Just"* and *"The Haunting of Low Fennel"* (about forgotten horror lurking in a Burmese temple), consequently remained relatively unknown.

Although Boris Karloff's seminal portrayal of the role in the monochrome ees conjured up a heady atmosphere, the proliferation of Fu Manchu films during the 1960's were more action-orientated, their "boys-own" style echoing Rohmer's own origins of journalist, then crime fiction writer.

Following on from *The Face of Fu Manchu* (1965), *Brides of Fu Manchu* is helmed by the periodically excellent Don Sharp, who uncharacteristically foregoes his usual adroit feel for atmosphere in favour of kinetic pacing and frenetic thrills.

The rather audacious scheme Fu Manchu is hatching this time revolves around his abduction of 12 beautiful girls - all daughters of leading

industrialists throughout the world, and held captive in his North African temple lair, whilst blackmailing the scientists into helping him to develop his master plan for transmitting energy as sound waves in order to destroy any selected city.

Christopher Lee commands great respect as the nefarious oppressor, facing his nemesis from Scotland Yard, Nayland Smith (Douglas Wilmer), with the smouldering masochist Tsei Chin as Fu Manchu's daughter and Inspector Clouseau regular Burt Kwouk as one of his egregious acolytes.

Sharp manages to focus on some inventive set-pieces and fertile images - the incongruous sight of Fu Manchu's followers attempting to kidnap one potential victim with Tower Bridge as a backdrop, to the extended fistcuffs between Nayland Smith and the Tibetan assassins which breaks out during a ballet performance - and later on, in a hospital.

Nayland Smith emerges victorious during a rather enfeebled, sub-James Bond climax as Fu Manchu's temple is unconvincingly raised to the ground

courtesy of some grainy stock footage.

Sharp is better served by his opulent sets as the camera glides over the assorted jacks and Egyptian statues which comprise Fu Manchu's lair, with the obligatory snake-pit providing some more visceral moments to relish.

The conclusion is presaged by Fu Manchu's now legendary warning that "The world will hear from me again, which indeed it did, two years later in Jeremy Sumner's *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu*, before the reins were handed over to none other than Jess Franco for *The Castle of Fu Manchu*.



# MURDER BY DECREE

***Toe-sucking, tax problems and marital stress aside, the Royal Family have suffered far greater, and graver, indignities over the years as the first in our regular series on Sherlock Holmes films will testify.***



"There's this scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skin of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it." (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*.)

Little did Conan Doyle realise it at the time, but the famous detective he gave birth to in the pages of the *"Strand"* magazine has transcended "his" humble pulp origins to become regarded as a "real-life member of society" - the ultimate sociode an audience can bestow upon any literary creation.

Conversely, the very real figure of Jack the Ripper has assumed almost mythical proportions due to the seemingly endless mystery regarding his "true" identity.

The Ripper, like Holmes, has been exhaustively researched and studied, although the thickening fog which cloaked

his crimes has also served to shroud his own identity.

Given the aura of mystique surrounding the Ripper, who remains an enigma in his own right, and the vast popularity, not to mention influential status of Holmes, it is hardly surprising that the "master villain" and "master detective" have been invigiled into pitting their wits against one another by filmmakers.

Whilst James Hill's British/German co-production, *A Study in Terror* (1955) is probably the seminal work in the genre, it is Bob Clark's *Murder By Decree* which further develops the source material, adding a high degree of political intrigue to the former film's social commentary.

What Clark manages most successfully is to draw upon popular perceptions of the two primary figures, together with a fascinating scenario

appertaining to the unmasking of the Ripper.

By comparing both Holmes and the Ripper we can glean why both men have continued in being the subject of such prolonged public captivation.

Holmes is literally a very "singular" figure, aided only by his faithful companion Watson, and he is a man not given to emotional and sensual pursuits. Holmes is described as "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen" but "as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position".

For Holmes, pleasure must come from the thrill of the chase pursuing his criminal prey, his luxuriating from his violent recitals at 221b Baker Street, also finding solace in his well-documented vice of frequent morphine injections.

Almost paradoxically, the Ripper appears as a more widely passionate man, ruled by his "heart" as opposed to his head, only this emotion has become perverted and now manifests itself as uncontrolled homicidal lust and brutal misogyny. He possesses both the intelligence and cunning of Holmes, but uses them to vastly differing ends as they continually furnish his escape from the police, (though an explanation for his inexplicable elusiveness is offered in *Murder By Decree*).

Both are dynamic men, being at the apex of their professions - albeit a nervous one in the Ripper's case. The period that their actions take place during has also helped foster the enduring fascination felt by the public towards them. To take one view, it is a very romantic London which they frequent,

complete with horse-drawn hackneys, exquisitely costumed ladies and gentlemen, together with a general air of civility. Beneath this veneer of respectability however, lies a city swamped with prostitution, racial discrimination and corruption - a poverty-stricken society where countless souls starved to death or were forced into squalid workhouses.

Against this precarious social background, enter the spectre of resurgent political polemics - the catalyst to light the fuse on an already potentially explosive situation.

Clark's film, and its ingenious and very plausible premise, is inspired by the theories elucidated in Stephen Knight's book, *"Jack the Ripper - The Final Solution"*. He argues that the Ripper's elusiveness is the result of a conspiracy of silence between the monarchy, the police and the government.

Knight claims that the then Duke of Clarence unwittingly precipitated the Ripper murders by his indiscretion with a shop girl called Annie Crook, who he secretly married and had a child with. Upon learning this, the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury feared an upsurge of republican support against an already tense background of civil unrest and anti-monarchist resentment.

*the Ripper's elusiveness being the result of a conspiracy of silence between the monarchy, the police and the government.*

What compounded matters was that Annie was also a catholic, in a period of resurgent anti-catholicism. Salisbury, taking the initiative, ordered a raid on the Cleveland Street studio where Crook also modelled, simultaneously hauling off the Duke who was to be kept under constant supervision for the remainder of his life. Annie was taken to a variety of workhouses and asylums where she eventually died, over 30 years later.

Unfortunately, she confided in a friend (indirectly signing her death warrant), Mary Kelly, a whitechapel prostitute, giving her the baby, and who in turn shared the "secret" of the royal child with some of her girlfriends.

Salisbury, fearing instant retributions, ordered John Gull, the royal physician, Sir Robert Anderson, Assistant



Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and a coachman, John Nettley, to silence the women.

With Gull and Anderson belonging to the same lodge of freemasons as Salisbury, the women were murdered in strict accordance with masonic ritual.

If it is this scenario that *Murder By Decree* adopts in a most invigorating manner. From the carefully composed opening scenes we can appreciate that the tone of a masterful work is being established.

The ominously gloomy streets of Whitechapel dominate the sequence as, from long shot, a horse-drawn hansom glides into view, unnervingly distorted by the fish-eye lens of the camera, elongating the nebulous carriage to monstrous proportions.

It is an insight into the blurred, diseased minds of the film's killers, the continually tracking camera prowling amongst every space and pore of the claustrophobic, unit alleys - now eerily deserted. The camera stares unflinchingly into the killer's eyes before he pounces on his victims. Their slow-motion deaths scored with straining violins and luriduous piano motifs are inter-cut with scenes of Holmes (Christopher Plummer) and Watson (James Mason) attending the theatre. It is the fiercely patriotic Watson who saves the King from a chorus of disapproval by instilling a retakatory round of applause, though Holmes poignantly counters: "I prefer acts of bad manners in the opera to acts of violence in the streets."

So, in the space of 5 minutes, Clark

(who previously directed the horror "sleeper" *Deathdream* in 1974), has imparted to us the deranged workings of the Ripper's mind as well as illustrating the current groundswell of anti-royalist sentiment that is sweeping the country.

The film begins with the third Ripper murder which is indicative of Clark's approach - concentrating on Holmes unravelling of the intricate clues rather than the Ripper's visceral indulgences. As director Clark himself confirmed upon the film's release, *"Jack the Ripper"* is not the whole point behind the plot, but who is trying to hinder Holmes investigations? Clark continues, "Radicals and socialists are helping him. Monarchist organisations are trying to stop him, and a couple of secret societies are involved."

Certainly, no time is wasted developing the "conspiracy" theory as the police are incriminated from very early on. In the film as Watson asks why the police haven't yet sought Holmes help - even after 3 Ripper murders.

Holmes also uncovers Sir Charles Warren's (Anthony Quinn) involvement on discovering how he had erased a message chalked onto a wall near one of the victim's. Its content, "The Jews are not the men that will be blamed for nothing", Warren dismisses as the inflammatory work of anti-semitic groups currently at large.

Holmes however, having already established from Inspector Fobborough (David Hemmings) that Sir Charles has "many secret friends", realises the true masonic importance behind the word

***"Throat cut across, the left breast torn open, the heart and other organs thrown over the left shoulder."***

"Jewess" That is, according to mesonic scripture, the 3 men who murdered the Grand Master, builder of Solomon's temple should be punished thus, "Throat cut across, the left breast torn open, the heart and other organs thrown over the left shoulder", exactly the macabre ritual performed by the Ripper on his victims.

Clark's own natural affinity for the genre is indicated in a wealth of impressive scenes. These include the forbidding, mist enshrouded streets, to the culminating dockland apocryph as Holmes fights his clocked adversary, accompanied only by the stark monotone cries of a ship's toghorn.

Judicious cutting enhances the scene in which Holmes finally traces Mary Kelly (Susan Clark) to a desolate wharf area. The silence of their surroundings is inter-cut with the rapidly approaching horse-drawn carriage which will eventually charge down Holmes and kidnap Kelly. The juxtaposition between sound and silence is then artfully merged into one as the clattering hooves and wheels converge on the startled pair.

Holmes subsequent meeting with Annie Crook, (sensitively played by Genevieve Bujold), tears at the emotions as Holmes vents his understandable anger upon the director of the asylum for condemning the sane Annie to a virtual "life sentence" amongst the insane minds imprisoned there. Holmes sense of outrage here, is accumulated by his growing realisation that the authorities are conspiring against him, "I've been exploited by the very people we are searching" he opines bitterly.

Holmes increasing frustration is compounded by the "detached" arrogance of Foxborough, who is revealed as a radical, prepared to help perpetuate the Ripper's abhorrent murders in order to use them as a political lever with which to bring a "decadent monarchy to its knees". As Holmes has noted, Foxborough is as culpable as the Ripper himself, describing him a "a man devoid of conscience, as guilty as the murderer himself".

The master sleuths then discover the

whereabouts of the hapless Mary Kelly, only too late to save her as the eerie glow from an open fire yields not warmth but the sadistic means by which the dual Ripper killers, a coachman (Peter Jonfield) and "respected" physician (Ploy Lansford), can torture their victim providing them both with a red hot poker and the necessary "operating" light for the macabre to continue their butcher's surgery unabated.

Holmes entrance into the macabre chancel house literally "fans the flames" as he and Watson narrowly escape the flying embers. Their pursuit of the killers sees the "premature" end of the physician - found corpse-like in the madmen's carriage, his hands drenched in the blood from his earlier butchery, whilst the fleeing coachman's extended sword-stick runs the chasing Foxborough through - the inspector's body callously thrown backwards into a wooden fence, before Holmes tracks

his prey to the nearby wharf - the killer appropriately becoming ensnared in a fishing net to die a lingering death by asphyxiation.

The only major criticism that the film does invite is it's rather vapid denouement as Holmes confronts the establishment and roundly accuses them for their complicity in the crimes, only then to retreat and accept the relatively paltry compromise of his "silence" in the matter guaranteeing the survival of Crook's (as yet) unharmed baby.

This tame ending should not detract however, from what is an otherwise uniformly excellent film, well worth a place in the higher echelons of horror cinema. The direction, atmospheric photography, backed up by a convincing cast, are all superb.

Plummer's lascivious Holmes isn't content with apprehending the culprits, he reproaches himself for "allowing" Mary Kelly's death to happen, and is





still prepared to challenge the corruption riddled authorities with the powerful reminder that, "we've unmasked madmen, wielding sceptres, reason run riot, justice howling at the moon"

Mason's solid Watson, though less prevalent, should not be underestimated, offering us a petriotic, but equally sympathetic figure, with fierce resolve and an intuitive nature

*"We've unmasked madmen  
wielding sceptres, reason  
run riot, justice howling  
at the moon"*

It is to Holmes again that we turn to for the film's most poignant comment, when, speaking of the conspirators he denounces them for, "creating an allegiance above your own allegiance to humanity, you will not feel for the them (the victims) or acknowledge their pain - there lies the true madness"

It is a moving invective because Holmes has unraveled the "scarlet thread of murder" running through life, but in doing so has also unearthed an equally repulsive human character trait, that of Machiavellian moral bankruptcy and

and almost total human impropriety within the confines of the establishment

*"creating an allegiance  
above your own  
allegiance to humanity.  
You will not feel for them  
or acknowledge their pain  
there lies the madness"*

in the deaths of the impoverished innocents, carried out by the wealthy elite, we have truly witnessed a "Murder By Decree"

We have also in the process, been party to the definitive Sherlock Holmes/ Jack the Ripper film, if not the definitive Sherlock Holmes



# THE SPY IN THE GREEN HAT

**"Open Channel D." Yes, the boys are back in town as U.N.C.L.E. fights a nasty dose of T.H.R.U.S.H.!**

Very much considered the "poor man's" James Bond, I've always felt the U.N.C.L.E. films to be far more enjoyable and certainly less self-conscious than the increasingly overblown and over-hyped Bond sagas.

The series ethos seems to be "cheap can be entertaining" as the cardboard sets and fake scenery only serve to add a certain degree of primitive charm to the proceedings. Likewise, the completely outrageous plots and situations.

The fact that most of the films are re-edited and expanded versions of already existing 1 hour tv shows seems highly appropriate somehow with studio resourcefulness matching the ingenuity shown by the U.N.C.L.E. agents.

While the sprawling budgets of the Bond films swamp all else, and the similarly implausible plots are rendered as "serious", an alienated audience can instead warm to the intrepid U.N.C.L.E. men for an entirely different view of the weird and wonderful world of espionage. After all, when James Bond gets the girl ad nauseum, Napoleon Solo is most likely to get a slap in the face, and where Bond is likely to end up strapped to a table staring at a deadly laser beam, the U.N.C.L.E. agents are to be found trapped in a room rapidly filling up with sand, or at the bottom of a giant wine vat. Likewise, as Bond is battling the Soviets Solo is aided by one, and whilst 007 is being manacled by the ominous underworld organisation SPECTRE, U.N.C.L.E. are fighting off a bad case of, well, THRUSH!

A quantum leap from the near venerable to the near venerable will transport you into the welcoming delights of *The Spy in the Green Hat* however.

Absly directed by Joseph Sargent (ha, of *Jaws 2* "Yame"), the film unites U.N.C.L.E. agents Napoleon Solo (Robert Vaughn) and Ilia Kuryakin (David McCallum) on a mission to halt the ambitious plans of wines and spirits tycoon, Louis Strago (Jack Palance) - more importantly though, also a fully paid up member of THRUSH.

Strago's ingenious plan? To use missiles to divert the flow of the Gulf stream



in order that Greenland can become home for the new master race, but consequently transforming the rest of the world into an ice-box.

Strago even has his very own "ice-maiden" at his disposal in the venemous form of Psycho's Janet Leigh as Miss Diketon (!), ably supported by Dr Kronin (Ludwig Donath) - the world's most wanted nazi scientist!

Although the action switches rapidly to diverse parts of the globe, from Strago's Sicilian vineyards to THRUSH's tropical missile base, you're still left with the overriding impression that these films must have one hell of a set designer!

Of course, Solo and Kuryakin repulse the THRUSH threat as equilibrium is restored by the destruction of the site station which meets a watery end, but the U.N.C.L.E. agents victory is accomplished with abundant style and humor.

Indicative of the films irreverent approach is Leigh's spirited sashet - her kiltie housed in her suspender belt as opposed to a poisonous shoe, and whose torture methods draw praise from Kronin, "I cannot forget how beautifully you tortured that U.N.C.L.E. agent", with "Oh, that's awfully sweet!" as her wicked reply, heaving "I'm going to love you - to death!" to Kuryakin as she

torments him with an electric probe.

Her later cat-bight with an equally predatory captive, Pia Morton (Lebba Roman) acts as the precursor to Diketon's own eventual downfall, before she too assists in the overthrow of Strago and his leader - Mr Thaler (Will Kuluve), the titular "green-hatted" spy, revealing in her dispatch of one guard as her knife thrust leaves his body in death-spasm and hers experiencing an orgasmic rush.

As ever, the laconic, dependable Kuryakin is left to act as foil to Solo's debonair charmer, whose own seductive powers land him in deep trouble when he is discovered underneath Morton's bed and dragged into marrying her, and consequently, into her morose clau.

As a result, Kuryakin's speculative question, "How is your burgeoning romance", is met with the ironic repender, "It threatens to burgeon too far!" Solo's attempts to evade impending marital "bliss" are hampered by the appearance of the "retired" Stiletto Brothers whose Latin temperament and volucosa "diplomacy" enables the U.N.C.L.E. agents to defeat THRUSH whilst also providing the film's best line as Kuryakin throws a "fruit grenade" at them - "Look out - it's a pineapple!" With the scenery-chewing Palance and Leigh also in full flight - don't miss!

# SHOGUN ASSASSIN

**Oriental splendour and style from the Vipco vaults.**

"That was the night everything changed for ever," Akishiro Tomikawa, infant son of Samurai Lone Wolf (Tomesaburo Wakayama) prophetically announces upon their mothers' slaughter by imperial ninjas. Lone Wolf's ominous response that "they will pay, rivers of blood", is carried out to the full as he and his young son reap their own bloody revenge against the murderous Shogun dynasty.

Once consigned to the relative limbo of the "master" list, this letterboxed and VIPCO release is a gore-laden treat and has quite rightly been dubbed a "stunning visual ballet of violence and bloodletting".

Yes, indeed there are copious splashes of blood and numerous scenes of outrageous violence, but it's all carried off with great verve and the kind of capricious, almost "jovial" charm unique to this particular kind of oriental far - ditto *A Chinese Ghost Story* and *Zu Warriors* to name but two. Yet narrative and stylistic cohesion (remarkably) remain intact throughout, despite the film being edited from two different features emanating from the popular Japanese *Sword of Vengeance* series.

Amongst the surreal scenes of violence here are a graphic face-splitting, a crimson-coated waterfall battle, with Lone Wolf, having defeated the male ninjas, then opposing the might of the former sex, led by Sayaka (Kayo Matsuo), who prove their "mettle" by systematically limb-knocking a hapless ninja whose bloodied torso recalls some of the finer "Pythonesque" - inspired moments in cinema.

Enlisting the aid of his son's sword-laden cart, Lone Wolf then decimates the remaining ninjas before finally confronting the Shogun's elite fighters - the "Masters of Death". Lone Wolf triumphs again in an inversive desert finale leaving his son to wax lyrical about the violence-filled future they will both inevitably face.

Although this version of the film (supplemented and directed by Kenji Masumi

and Robert Houston respectively), is the Americanised production, usually signalling artistic and aesthetic compromise, the film does retain its visual poetry as great arterial bursts of blood symbolically drain from victims against the saffron hues of sunset - witness the demise of the Shogun's son as he torso twitches in a macabre dance of death whilst elsewhere, a bare breast gives way to a suckling baby rather than simple exploitation images.

The film's extreme body count is rendered almost inoffensive due to the deliberate, choreographed nature of Lone Wolf's (fatal) sword thrusts. As such, the veritable "blood ballet" reaches full impact as Lone Wolf despatches numerous ninja opponents, his sword-strokes and acrobatic moves often superimposed upon the fading images of departed foe.

His pursuit of Sayaka proves most revelatory however, as having failed in his first attempt to kill her, he then displays a singular act of mercy by refusing a second chance to strike - Sayaka reminding him of his own wife as his perceptive son indicates to us.

Similar emotional sub-texts are awakened as Lone Wolf lies injured - his ever loving and protective son carrying him drops of life-giving water, exchanging his coat for band of a roadside shrine he also uses to pray for his father's recovery.

Likewise, having narrowly escaped a burning ship, but not the biting cold of their shore-line refuge, Lone Wolf's removal of Sayaka's clothes signals a warm and welcoming embrace of body heat to ensure survival and not a brutal rape as it first appears.

Such emotions are buried forever in the inversive desert climax however, as the tormented glow of one of the Masters of Death takes the "barren" sand before gradually turning red as the would-be rebel assassins are discovered hiding beneath the sand.

As the triumvirate guard the Shogun's brother Lone Wolf appears with revenge

on his mind, not to mention the gold he is promised for extirpating the Shogun dynasty.

The first "master" falls in gruesome style - his face split in two, a geyser of blood erupting as the body is silhouetted against the sand dunes like some collapsed grim reaper. Whilst the second "master" receives an almost cursory sword-out, the third "master", his windpipe now severed, sees fit to eulogise upon the meaning of death and providing his own epitaph thus: "Your technique is magnificent, when cut across the neck a sound like wailing wren's wails is heard".

It's certainly an ill wind that blows for the Shogun's brother, who proclaiming his regal importance is countered by Lone Wolf's withering expose. Shogun means nothing to me - die! "The carnate lens, appropriately by now, drenched in blood, clears in time for us to see Lone Wolf and his son walking off into the distance across the wind-swept desert.

If anything, their future life would seem as bleak and unappealing as the sandy wastes they tread, but despite the carnage, the father/son relationship remains warm and loving, at times even tender, with Lone Wolf's relentless pursuit of the Shogun, driven by the noble motivation of "biblical" retribution and justice to avenge his wife's death.

Almost as bizarre as some of the visual images on show, Mark Lindsay and Michael Lewis's eclectic synthesiser score succeeds in adding an extra dimension to the film - the music never entirely inappropriate but bold enough to conjure up companions with a more disco-orientated version of Goblin.

*Shogun Assassin* - with its saturated colours and continual excitement, justifiably claims its exalted position, deserving to be amongst the vanguard of the currently prominent - increasingly popular, oriental film explosion.

# THE REBIRTH OF VIPCO - NO MORE MR NASTY ?

Something is stirring in the recently bloodless video industry. Read on....

The success of "The Lowes Guide" and other explicit adult material has also helped to loosen the constraints regarding the release of hitherto banned horror classics as Vipco supremo Mike Lee explains.

**Can you explain Vipco's demise after the "video nasty" era and your subsequent re-emergence.**

The reason at that time was that shops were very frightened to carry the sort of product that Vipco distributed, so there wasn't really anyone to sell to because they were rather concerned about it and in fairness, what we had to do was wait to find out what would happen with the classification system and what might happen to these movies. It has taken quite a long time before we feel we've been able to resubmit the films that were causing the problems at that time.

**Is your policy of releasing hitherto banned films such as *Zombie Flesh Eaters* and *Deathrap* a concerted attempt at reducing censorship.**

I wouldn't say its an attack at censorship per se. I would turn round and say that I have strong feelings about certain movies that I think should be seen and have a right to be seen and if I'm the only voice for these movies then so be it. I'm not saying that I'm attacking censorship at all but I am saying that I would like to have these films passed and available for the public to see. I think that they come from a particular period of time, are representative of certain director's work who have since gone on to do other things. Even Abel Ferrara who starred and directed *The Driller Killer* has gone on to do other movies now so I'd like to eventually have that one passed, whether or not they do remains to be seen, but *Driller Killer* is an important part of his work, so indeed *Deathrap* is for Tobe Hooper.

**Have you found a new "enlightened" approach towards your product from the BBFC given the supposed lowering of trade barriers heralded by 1992.**

I think there's things to be taken into account here for 1992, with the trade barriers for the

E.E.C. coming down and I think that tastes are changing in wake of that.

**So you think that it's going to be an ongoing process with Vipco hopefully releasing more output with less censorship even.**

I'm hopeful, but we can't be sure and needless to say should we get the problems we experienced before we would have to shut up shop and cease from distributing product yet again but I'm hopeful that won't happen.

**I understand you plan to submit both *Driller Killer* and *House On The Edge Of The Park* to the BBFC - how do you think these notorious films will fare.**

Well, *House On The Edge Of The Park* I'm not proposing to do at this time but I'm hopeful that within the first six months of next year we will be able to submit *Driller Killer*. This is a sensitive film based on the campaign it had around 10 years ago its about the degeneration of a man's psyche and if it were sensitively handled, would justify a position in the market place.

**Vipco have shown a commendable policy for releasing cult films such as *Shogun Assassin*, is this a deliberate move, and if so, what other cult films are scheduled for release.**

Well, we have quite a number of these films to go - I cannot say which order they will be





**"Flesh For Frankenstein is an excellent film, although some people may consider the contents to be offensive, we're not of the same mind."**

coming in because a lot depends upon the sensitivity of the BBFC. It's Vipo's intention to release as many of these cult classic movies as is possible and of course, *Shogun Assassin* is a wonderful film having got through unscathed on its release this time.

**Are there plans to release foreign films much sought after by horror fans. I'm thinking of Dario Argento's *Deep Red*, *Tenebre* and *Inferno* for example, together with the films of Mario Bava and Jess Franco.**

We don't own the rights to the movies that you've mentioned just now but we are negotiating all the time trying to buy rights to films like these for issue, so yes, you're bang in the right ball-park. There is a prospect, and anybody who would like to mention names to us that they would like to see released that we're not aware of or haven't been up for a while, we're only a small company but we are trying our best to get out what we can and are open to feedback from our customers.

**Do you think that there is scope to release such rarities in widescreen versions, specifically aimed at collectors with "making of the film" booklets and other such additional material included.**

Yes, that's something we're going to redress the balance on with the release of *Zombie Flesh Eaters* in widescreen which will be the first previously banned movie to be issued in such a format and I will say now that it makes a tremendous difference to the movie. The difficulty remains however, that with not being a major studio we don't control everything when it's being made and those thoughts are not often put together at the time of the film production, and of course we could be talking about movies which are over 25 years old. It is something that we've looked at, to create an informative booklet, but we don't really want to rush off half-cooked. Unless the information is exact we don't want to publish anything, so yes, that may well come about next year at some point, but I can't guarantee any dates at the moment.

**What about future releases - the *Fuful* and *Werhol* films for example.**

*City of the Living Dead* and *The Beyond* are released at the moment and we're hopeful for the *New York Ripper*.

**The *New York Ripper*! How do you think that's going to get through - presumably with a lot of cuts.**

Well, we're hopeful. I don't think it's been allowed through before. It's been banned previously but it would be one that as it's part of Lucio Fulci's work, I think that we'd like to see it available. The *House by the Cemetery* is released in October with plans for all three of his films to be released in widescreen format next year with *Werhol's Blood For Dracula* and *Flesh For Frankenstein* hopeful for the first quarter of next year.

**Do you think that people like *Werhol* with their "artistic" connotations have more chance of their films being released uncut.**

Well, *Blood For Dracula* I'm hopeful will cause no problem. *Flesh For Frankenstein* still might cause a problem bearing in mind the background that you're mentioning, but I think we have a strong case especially with his recent death, but *Flesh For Frankenstein* is an excellent film, although some people may consider the contents to be offensive, we're not of the same mind, but we'll tread carefully in dealing with that one.

**Can you tell me something about *Lord Ruckenstein*.**

He was the leading character in a movie called *Cremaster* (I), and indeed for a lot of fun at the General Election, he decided to stand against John Major as I'm sure you're well aware. I think he got something like 107 votes this time.

**So you were narrowly defeated!**

Yes indeed. There was some cause for consternation up there of course but it all settled down in the end and John Major

eventually got through but it was a bit of a fight for him!

**With Vipo though, you appear to be on the winning side so it was.**

The important thing is that even though we are I really want to try and keep it going. I do not want to find that they come down on us and say that these movies mustn't be allowed yet again, so I want to try and make sure there's a presence in the shops. Sales are going well, not enormous because there's still a resistance out there, but the public want to buy them - that's the good news. As long as they are aware that the films are there, they'll buy them and of course the more support we get the more films we can buy in that they wouldn't otherwise have. So long as we're financially sound we can keep buying the rights to movies that we would like to release that are not (currently) available and I think that we'll probably be the only voice for these films.



# EATEN ALIVE

*He may not be Hannibal Lecter but gregarious Italian director Umberto Lenzi proves that he too enjoys having friends over for dinner!*

Given his propensity for churning out gore-laden cannibal atrocities, Umberto Lenzi's *Eaten Alive* is in many ways an opportune release, appropriating scenes from one of his previous films, *Deep River Savages*, together with cannibalising sequences from Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* and Sergio Martino's *Prisoner of the Cannibal God*. Lenzi's inherent plagiarism doesn't end here either as his Indiana Jones styled hero (Robert Kerman) leads a naive Janet Agren into the (supposed) New Guinea jungle in search of her "missing" sister, only to find her now assimilated into the brethren of a Jim Jones type "purification cult" presided over by Ivan Rassimov, doing his very best to conjure up visions of Apocalypse Now's equally sanguinary Colonel Kurtz.

That's where comparisons between the two films and however as Lenzi's customary catalogue of grue and sadism betrays its sick bag origins rather than aspiring to any greater sense of grand pugna! As such, *Cannibal Holocaust*'s most effective plot conceit - the old scratched can of film trick, detailing native atrocities upon its discovery, reappears here as Agren views her sister's holiday film which we're never going to see on "Wish You Were Here".

Amongst the "delights" on show are some bizarre rituals, including an uncomfortable mondo sequence as natives are summarily nipple-perced and then strung up by hooks in true *A Man Called Horse* fashion, the one-film projector's incessant "clicking" providing some real background authenticity.

Other harrowing mondo scenes include the arbitrary disembowelling of a live crocodile (thankfully truncated in the *Vimeo* release which is basically the theatrical version which played UK cinemas), together with some cursory snake-sitting and milking scenes. The most reprehensible aspect here, as with numerous other cannibal films, is the

juxtaposition of real-life animal slaughter with avowedly fake human torture footage. In order to add a sense of verisimilitude to the proceedings. Indeed to this end, once the documentary style native film is dispensed with, Lenzi makes full use of gritty, hand-held camera shots for added realism as he merges the complete range of his exploitation repertoire with chunks of cinema verité.

Lenzi also hangs his film around the staple "civilised" world/third world dichotomy as Rassimov's band of blinkered followers preach fraternity whilst he practises a spot of wanton poisoning and pilaging, not to mention some sneaky embezzling - all in the name of religion of course.

The similarity between Rassimov's cynical brand of deceit and certain other soft-styled TV evangelists in America is frightening (just check out US punk band the Dead Kennedys' "In God We Trust" e.p. for a powerful invective against the dollar-billed fraudsters posing as god-driven clergy).

The sect's ecological ethos, "using pain to reunite man with nature" re-creates the iconic rhapsody that "Americans will believe in anything that's tax deductible" as the country's business ethos (or lack of them), fall under the microscope momentarily.

It is trivial rather than commercial ethics however, which are portrayed in *Eaten Alive* as marauding cannibals rape one victim, before in close shot, eating her hand - biting the hand that bleeds as it were, whilst another widowed victim is raped by her triumvirate of drooping brothers-in-law in order that she be set "free" for future marriage, if also decidedly sullied. The most nauseating sight of all though remains the entrail, snake and lizard soup which a group of togloidyde cannibals greedily devour in one scene - ugh!

Rassimov seeks to satiate his own rapacious "palate" with his pursuit of Agren and her sister which is more

carnal than ecclesiastical in motivation, whilst his genocidal offering to the dying masses becomes an epitaph worthy of "The Last Supper" sobriquet.

Amidst this wholesale destruction Agren and Kerman are left to escape the sect's clutches via Mel Ferrer's rescue helicopter, while Rassimov flees to (presumably) recruit more glibble members with which to populate a new sect.

Unintentionally and often hilariously, Lenzi manages to coax some wildly surrealistic scenes from the film, not better than the solemn funeral rites being held for a suicide victim where Bach's "Toccata" rages in the background, or the unexpected burst of "Glory, Glory Hallelujah" from the sect's disciples as they sip their "purifying" ambrosia.

There is also the awe-inspiring sight of Agren, painted gold and offered up in worship to his lewdness - Rassimov, whose self-proclamation to "lead mankind out of bondage" is probably not extended to the shapely Ms. Agren.

Lenzi also helms an almost James Bond/New Avengers style opening to the film as we see a bow-dart assassin in action in Niagara, before jump-cutting to similar scenes in down town New York. Certainly the exquisite Niagara backdrop and breathtaking aerial glimpses of the St. Lankan locations are the only beautiful aspects of the film whilst composer Rudy Magliore's funeral dirichds lend atmosphere to some sequences (the same music also appearing in Lenzi's notorious *Cannibal Ferox*).

*Eaten Alive* is not the worst entry you'll ever see in the diverse cannibal sub-genre but really does it rise above the most perfunctory of levels, and it absolutely fails to attain the virginitous "heights" of authenticity that prevail in *Apocalypse Now* and *Cannibal Holocaust*, which Lenzi strives so desperately to emulate. Even the innocent face of a crying child beckoning to us reveals no pathos, only the thought that once again we have wallowed awhile in Lenzi's own exploitative and decidedly mean spirited deluded jungle.

# FIXATION

## AT THE HORROR STAGE

*An old classic is back in our midst with the release of Lucio Fulci's masterly **The House By The Cemetery**. We've laid it bare on the slab ( psychiatrists couch ), with some psychoanalysis of our own.*

**" No one will ever know whether children are monsters or monsters are children. " - Henry James .**

Praised by no less an organ than the *Sunday Times* for its "style" and "restraint", and by the venerable *Stardust* as having "one of the best sustained climaxes in Gothic melodrama", Fulci's film is very definitely a notch or two above average.

For many, Fulci is heralded as a sporadically glimmering stylist, whilst to others his oeuvre remains anathema - the stumbling efforts of a workman-like "hack". Whatever your view, in no way can the can "hack" argument be substantiated. In fact, irrefutable evidence to the contrary can be gleaned by viewing his early classic, *Don't Torture The Duckling* - a rare and revealing insight into cloistered community tensions, cultural displacement, together with some trademark Fulci violence to create an unsettling though enjoyable gem.

In spite of this VHS release being virtually the same bowdlerised version of *House By The Cemetery* put out by Elephant Video some years back, only some extended gore scenes are missing - not the more subtle directional nuances which elevate the film so impressively and yes, this release is letterboxed.

Despite the token Henry James epitaph, what makes Fulci's film so successful is its intriguing combination of Freudian theories and Frankenstein myth, together with some baroque gothic flair and an unusual concentration upon the film's non-adult characters.

As is symptomatic of a Fulci film, narrative drive and plot cohesion are sacrificed upon the altar of visual excess as outbursts of violence gradually unfold.

The backdrop to all this is provided by an academic, Norman Boyle (Paolo Malco) and his unhealthy interest (bordering on the obsessive), with the mysterious demise of a colleague, Professor Peterson, whose imposing New Whittby residence Boyle moves into, along with his neurotic wife Lucy (Catherine MacCall) and their young son Bob (Giovanni Frezza).

Boyle discovers that Peterson's shakelike research had become progressively more esoteric, delving into suicides, missing persons and unsolved murder cases, before Peterson himself went off the deep end killing his wife before taking his own life.

By paralleling Peterson's fatal commission, Boyle continues the research and uncovers the lurid history behind the house's most notorious owner, Dr Freudstein whose dubious experiments led to his banishment from medical practice during the late 19th century. Boyle goes on to make the most startling discovery of all - that Freudstein is still alive!

Boyle is very much a pivotal character in the film. His apparent willingness to endanger the lives of his family by remaining in the house, even after discovering Freudstein's existence resembles Peterson's behaviour previously - the comparison is even more directly drawn as both the town's estate agent and librarian remark at having seen Boyle at the house before - mistakenly, according to Boyle.

Old Norm even gets the kind of ominous build-up usually reserved for for Freudstein's entrance as first his booming footsteps and then his menacing

shadow prove to be false alarms, but the inference is clearly there - that Boyle and Freudstein have converging personalities in that Boyle will sacrifice his own family in the name of research, just as Freudstein will immolate his victims to further his own existence.

The agonising, claustrophobic denouement in Freudstein's chancel house cellar also proves Boyle's impotency as he succumbs all too easily (willingly ?) to Freudstein's murderous hand. He is also implicated as being responsible for Lucy's unstable mental state as it is he who prescribes the drugs which only serve to increase her neurosis - counterpoised with a later scene as Lucy awakes with a catfaced smile in a purchased bedroom, her medication left untouched by her side.

Freudstein himself cuts a most grotesque figure - a literal "mosaic of corpses" who bleeds maggots, the bodies of his victims providing the cell renews which ensure his survival. Whilst all the potentially fascinating thematic inherent in the name remain only partially explored, Freudstein does appear to be the perfect embodiment of Freud's "self-preservative drive" if not the relatively undeveloped "sexual drive", while both Peterson and Boyle's over-zealous pursuit of Freudstein invites obvious Frankenstein comparisons - you can almost imagine Boyle exclaiming "It's Alive!" upon Freudstein's initial appearance here.

As if the malevolent presence of the ubiquitous Freudstein wasn't enough to contend with, Fulci also enables the titular residence to almost "breathe" as it becomes an omnipresent "character"

in much the same way that Egon Heath dominates Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*.

What with its neo-gothic style and stained-glass windows the house almost takes on the appearance of being Freudstein's shrine - glaringly so when Lucy discovers Freudstein's headstone but into one of the floors, only for it later to gush crimson tidal waves as Fulci unashamedly treads on Amityville/Shining territory. The appearance of young May Freudstein, in effect the "guardian" of the house, just as Jack Nicholson's grinning bar-tender acts as eternal custodian in the Overlook Hotel, only serves to reinforce the similarity.

The house itself oozes menace from every pore as Fulci whips up a heady brew of gothic regalia ranging from creaking doors, to grissemier coated stairways and prowling camera's in flesh-colored cells, that only hint at the horror yet to come.

Despite all the gruesome gongs-on however, it is Fulci's "delicate" treatment of the film's children which invites the most comment. Although his by now "trademark" placing of children in danger continually drives the film, it is the adults who are killed, leaving the progeny to survive in a seemingly parallel "limbo universe".

This is established from the very start of the film as May's face, framed in a window, segues into a black and white photograph of the house accompanied by Walter Razzas's plaintive piano score. Audaciously, the picture adorns a New York Estate Agents wall, now falling under the Bob's intense gaze, inaugurating the "telepathic" link the two children share in one ambitious camera sweep.

May also acts as narrator for the film, warning Bob not to enter the house, while also exhibiting a finely developed sense of precognition as the shop-window mannequin she stares at loses its head, pre-empting the later decapitation of babysitter Ann (Anna Peroni).

Even though Ann is inhabiting a kind of dream-like limbo world, she often appears more down to earth than Bob whose musing soprano squeal sounds rather like a pig being taught to sing by Aled Jones.

His disembodied whine is used to good effect during the climactic conclusion as he struggles to free himself from Freudstein's grasp - eventually succeeding by exiting from the cellar via a jagged crack in Freudstein's tombstone - Bob's

jerked legs narrowly escaping the menacing clutches of Freudstein's gnarled hands.

The dictum that as soon as we are born we have begun to die is poignantly brought to mind by Bob's speedy ascension from the tombstone.

Yes, this ending does "apo" a film discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this issue, but it is nevertheless supremely effective, capping a fast, and emotionally engaging film with the most horrific of conclusions. That is, Freudstein remains unscathed, and of equal importance, so too does the house, waiting silently, yet eerily for its next victims, like some ancient monolithic beacon.

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# LEVRES DE SANG

***With the inspiration of poet Corbiere, artists Druillet and Caza, together with the work of surrealist painter Max Ernst, Jean Rollin - founder of the sex vampire film, trail-blazes his own particular brand of horror art across the screen ....***

If our own Ken Russell is considered the "wild child amongst British filmmakers, then France's Jean Rollin is very much the enfant terrible - as far as his own contemporaries are concerned.

Regarded with disdain in his own country, Rollin is paradoxically much revered across Europe, his films held in high esteem and the man himself is often elevated to the rank of auteur.

Rollin's own initiation into the horror genre could hardly have been more unexpected, having been first influenced by the relatively melancholic writings of 19th century poet Tristan Corbiere, and later by artist friends Druillet and Caza (who have also supplied Rollin with some of the stunning posters for his films).

Often duplicating entire surrealist paintings in his work, and citing Max Ernst as a foremost visual influence in his films, Rollin has very much made the unique sub-genre - the sex vampire film, his own.

*Levres De Sang*, quite literally, "Lips of Blood", continues Rollin's preoccupation with the more erotic nuances inherent within the sanguinary vampire motif.

The perfunctory plot features a young man (Jean Lou Philippe) - who also co-authored the script, experiencing a succession of visceral memories - the ambiguity is deliberate, dominated by an old castle and ethereal woman clad in white (Ann Brand).

His total fascination with her becomes apparent as she leads him out from a cinema to the Montmartre cemetery where he releases a cluster of female vampires from their coffins.

Eventually he finds his way back to a dark dungeon where his family are encasing a coffin. His mother orders

him to destroy the formerly beautiful girl buried within, but his perverse love roars its head and he chooses instead to join with Brand - who it transpires, is his sister, entombed by their mother for vampirising their father.

Rollin, as is indicative of his style, relinquishes basic plot mechanics to a purely negligible level, instead, favouring the painterly images and visual brevity that so symbolises his films.

Thus, we hear a child's ghostly voice, the howling wind before glimpsing a rugged mountainside in one of Philippe's early visions. Seemingly unconnected images float in and out of the film before Rollin's surrealist vision an eerie shimmer into view.

Most impressive of all is the flash of lightning which accompanies the vampires awakening from their tombs, momentarily silhouetted, moving in captivating slow-motion towards their prey.

Light and shadow collide as Rollin pursues his expressionist night photography - in one instance a girl lies down across a waterfall, whilst elsewhere, beaming flashlights suffuse the night air, the signal for a vast array of water fountains to gush forth spirals of cascading liquid.

Even the obligatory vampire staking at the climax is performed against the evocative backdrop of ancient ruins and monoliths - the final image being that of a coffin washed away to sea.

This rather enigmatic finale was mirrored by *Levres*' disappointing box-office performance. Considered too restrained by both the horror and hardcore audiences Rollin hoped to attract, the film has been termed a "macabre poem" with Brand's virginal gown

symbolic of Freudian references, though these remain only feeling, never being fully explored.

With its striking locations and washed out colours *Levres* remains an elegiac period piece, not quite able to achieve David Pines' claims of Rollin's work being "cramped with visual extravagance, and certainly failing to capture the lyrical beauty, not forgetting the strident soundtrack to his earlier *Frescos*."

If anything, Rollin's delicate, artistic approach towards making horror films is to be applauded but it often leaves him open to the accusation that he is foregoing any attempts at cultivating tangible excitement and audience empathy for the characters by favouring such a unique brand of filmmaking.

To be fair, Rollin has attempted to provide a more powerful, visceral charge to his films with *Les Fleurs de la Mort* and *La Mort Vivante*, though both are only partially successful, eschewing many of his more visionary ideals in favour of blood and gore.

After a brief hiatus, the word is that Rollin is once again ready to return to the horror genre which is encouraging as like them or loathe them, his films are always entirely individual and unique exhibiting their own distinctive flair - qualities not always readily prevalent in horror cinema today.



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RAYMOND LOVELOCK • ARTHUR KENNEDY • CHRISTINE GALBO in  
**THE LIVING DEAD AT THE MANCHESTER MORGUE**

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# THE LIVING DEAD AT THE MANCHESTER MORGUE

If you can imagine Night of the Living Dead set in the English Lake District.....

The product of a rare Spanish / Italian collaboration, *The Living Dead*, (as it will now be abbreviated to), is the work of Spanish director Jorge Grau, who had previously made the Countess Elisabeth Bathory inspired *Condemned Sinners* in 1972.

*The Living Dead* is an engaging hybrid, comprising part Romero influences of zombies running amok, part political thriller and part ecological picture, all set amongst the verdant landscapes of the "jewel of the north", the Lake District.

The main protagonists - the imaginatively named Trendy George (Ray Lovelock) and the dull (by comparison) Edna, (Christine Gialbo), are two strangers who through force of circumstance, are obliged to travel together to a sleepy village deep in the heart of the Lake District. Upon their arrival, they begin to discover a growing army of zombies, a mysterious Department of Agriculture prototype machine using ultra-sonic soundwaves to alienate insects, and worst of all, an awesomely fascist policeman, Sergeant McCormack - played with customary relish by Arthur Kennedy. (Unfortunately, it's far to point out that this aspect of the film hasn't exactly endeared it to our beloved police authorities, but this shouldn't overshadow what is after all, an entirely thought-provoking film.)

Upon Edna's arrival in the Lakes, she finds her brother-in-law murdered and her junkie sister forcibly admitted to hospital, leaving George as her only companion to defeat the rampaging zombies.

The unmistakable influence of George Romero is evoked by Grau as a portentous radio message warns of "ecological problems" to provide the film with it's



primary subtext in the same way that Romero's epic utilizes radio and tv broadcasts to highlight a mysterious virus probe which has crashed to earth.

There's also a parallel scene early on in Grau's film as the local village tramp, Guthrie, lurches into view to maniac Edna in her car, who, having lost her keys, is forced to wade across a nearby stream in order to escape her would-be assailant. The reason for the tramp's dishevelled features becomes graphically apparent as the perplexed Edna reads of his "death", only the week before, in the local newspaper.

Just as Romero's sheriff embodies the very worst "gung-ho" and racist traits by shooting down the "nigger" hero, so to does McCormack gun down the doughy George during the conclusion of Grau's film.

Whilst the scenes of assorted "flesh -

eating in Romero's film were vilified at the time for their graphic nature, Grau is prepared to eclipse such concerns with the numerous visceral spectacles that dominate his opus.

This is most palpably executed in the celebrated "graveyard" sequence as George and Edna discover the gruesome truth in the ancient crypt, now populated by the zombieified corpse of Guthrie. Not content with attacking them, Guthrie also performs a rather bizarre ritual, anointing the eyelids of his fellow corpses with blood in order to reanimate them.

The horrified couple's only means of escape is a conveniently placed step-ladder leading up into a gravestone above - their distory ascent is milked for maximum suspense value by Grau as the zombies clutching hands just fail in their attempts to haul the couple back down to



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their doom. The claustrophobic tension here would also seem to have had a lasting effect on Lucio Fulci, as a similar scene in his *House by the Cemetery* will bear testimony to.

The sense of ensuing collapse against overwhelming odds is further heightened as the pair seek the relative "safety" of a bombed-out church, only to find that it offers increasing danger as opposed to sanctuary as it is bereft of further escape-doors, whilst the baying zombies outside break down the door with an upturned cross - the ultimate signal that god affords no protection with the zombies threatening eternal damnation, not to mention a painful (living) death.

The zombies subsequent graphic evisceration of a hapless policeman offers George and Edna their means of escape as they firebomb the distracted zombies, but although their lives have been saved momentarily, their freedom is far from assured as George is held responsible for the deaths and arrested, leaving Edna to be whisked off into the local hospital for treatment.

It is now that fear and the paranoia of wrongful imprisonment is brought to the fore as George, with increasing frustration, fails to convince McCormick of his innocence, and even more importantly, the certain danger that Edna faces in hospital.

Recent outbreaks of babies violently biting staff are not isolated incidents but quite literally the threat of zombism in its infancy - escalating to maulage

patients in the basement who summarily axe one unfortunate doctor in the head, strangle a nurse in the lift before performing an impromptu mastectomy on another victim as the zombies embark on an orgy of violence throughout the hospital, culminating with the "death" of Edna.

Although George's flight from the police cannot save these victims he does succeed in torching the hospital, and the zombies inside, but any brief sense of relief is curtailed by McCormick's lethal bullet, with the salutary parting shot, "I wish the dead could come back again to life you bastard, because then I could kill you again" which ironically serves as his own epitaph as George resembles Lazarus-like from the grave to finish off McCormick.

Throughout the film this antagonism between McCormick's abrasive police officer and the liberal George, reinforces existing social prejudices. On the side of authority and "respectable" moral behaviour, McCormick sees George as being into "drugs, sex, every sort of filth", whilst George indicates the mounting secularisation of society with the rejoinder, "It's not my fault if the christ and saints are out of fashion".

When not exploring this particular strain of social politics Grau is revealing the Mind of environmental concerns which are rapidly gathering momentum in the present "green" climate we live in.

Grau's opening image - of the ultra-sonic machine segues into what David

Prie has described as an "uneasy accumulation of detail" as smoke billows from power stations, dead birds pepper the roadside and litter-strewn streets dominate the landscape as the potential of an ecological disaster is evoked, juxtaposed with the surreal image of a streaking girl at a busy road junction during rush hour, as if her natural state, sans clothes, is advocating a "back to nature" manifesto.

The sight of the exquisite Lancashire countryside, only marred by the conspicuous presence of the Department of Agriculture's futuristic pest-control machine in the centre of an emerald field, reinforces the point.

Against the relatively complex background, Grau then utilises the more accustomed mechanics of horror-film making as he picks on atmosphere and a heavy sense of foreboding.

So, at night, the tranquil village locale is transformed into an eerie, fog-bound place, with deserted lanes and permanently howling wind - used to great effect when Edna is mortified to see her now zombified brother-in-law looming out of the mist, moving menacingly towards her. Contrast this with the daylight horrors in the aforementioned graveyard scene as lurid splashes of blood decorate the leafy hues of the lush surrounding countryside, and you can appreciate Grau's grasp of, and affinity for, the horror fundamentals.

Although this prize-winning film (awarded at the Silesia film festival), is deserving of its accolade, there are some momentary, albeit, minor quibbles to voice.

Sometimes the heady pol-pour of ecological and political viewpoints do conflict with the tesser, animalistic instincts harnessed by the film's zombies, with McCormick often seen as a greater threat to life than the voracious undead, whilst the climactic confrontation suggests that possibly only a zombie can defeat a fascist - rather negative politics and most surely not the film's mention.

These charges aside, *The Living Dead* more than compensates in other areas and rightfully earns its sobriquet of being at the vanguard of Pn's self-titled "Cinema of Gothic Anxiety".

# LOUD & STROUD !

*Roger Cook, eat your heart out - our It probably will be, as the Investigative king of visceral video cuisine, dissects the valedictory ode to mortality, Faces of Death.*

Hi there, gonfriends and welcome to the family section of this fab magazine, or should I say "Splatterfest" of blood and gastro juices - I love going over the top, don't you? No, well you better turn away because this is a video review with a difference - *Faces of Death*! Shockumentary at it's best - well we'll start at the beginning, with our guide through the realms of fact and fiction, Dr Francis Gross (a student of death), and he certainly has come up with the goods this time.

As with most mondo documentary type films, animals always feature highly whilst we seal massacres in which the narrator exclaims he will never wear animal fur again, but will he ever eat meat again as cows bleed to death with their throats cut and sheep go bungee jumping with meat hooks through their heads.

As well as pitbull fighting and other slaughterhouse footage, a python is eaten alive by piranhas - Greenpeace members would do well to steer clear of this feature, but budding chefs should

stay tuned as monkey has his skull broken open with dinner spoons and his warm brains eaten by hungry connoisseurs of raw meat - yum yum but I think I'll stick to grease burgers and slug chips. Anyway, don't think that us humans get away from the sharp eyed student of death, oh no since Bob - we're still to come.

First up, vicious car and bike crashes, all of which are real, with blood and torn flesh in abundance, unlike the next batch of goodies with avowedly fake electric chair antics in which we are led to believe the victim's eyes explode - it actually looks like some guy with missing teeth across his face and a touch of rabies. A fake beheading courtesy of our Middle East "friends" is equally poor.

Now on to the real stuff and what a classic. A plane crash in which large chunks of human flesh are unceremoniously dumped over an American housing estate, the Fire Service and police try to identify the mutilated corpses whilst survivors wander through the carnage like shadows in a land of death.

As a finishing scene (phew, Ed I), I have chosen the crocodile attack in which a poor victim feeding the crocs ends up as the main course as the brakes turn on him in a killing frenzy. The lifeless body, having been ripped to shreds, is then laid out on the river bank for all to see until later being covered with a blanket.

All in all, there's a "happy" ending with tower pictures and ghostly appearances filling the screen something lovely!

Well, that about finishes it for this issue save for...

**MONDO FACT:** *Faces of Death* grossed more than *Star Wars* during it's first week on release in Japan.

Hope you enjoyed yourselves. Copies of *Faces of Death* are available from the *Loud & Stroud* Connoisseur Catalogue - no thanks! (Ed).

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# LOVE BITES

*The "love bug" is most definitely in the air and looking for a "cure" is non other than nurse Traci Lords!*

Having first appeared in hardcore films at the tender age of 15, our Traci isn't exactly your typical Shirley Temple, child prodigy, but more along the lines of "a star is born."

Having "graced" numerous flesh "epics", including *Ladies in Lace*, *The Trials of Traci*, *Deep Inside Traci*, but most certainly *not* *Dick Tracy* (however appropriate it might seem), the former *orgasme* is now revealing acting capabilities as much as she is flesh, in the likes of Adam Rifkin's comedy *The Nutty Nut* where Traci plays a hench maid!

Her first non-hardcore leading role however, was in Jim Wynorski's remake of Roger Corman's sci-fi programmer *Not of the Earth* with Traci again essaying the part of a nurse - (typecasting or what?), and garnering complimentary reviews such as one critic's judgment that "the answer is yes, she can act."

A small steel town in Steubenville, Ohio seems an unlikely birthplace for a future porn film starlet, hitherto most famous as also being Dean Martin's hometown, but having shed these humble origins, her clothes and later, a well documented cocaine habit, Traci's main addiction now is her husband, though she is still prone to causing noise when posing for calendars clad only in leather bra and shorts, and seated on a motor-bike!

Although taking her surname from the suave Jack Lord of "Hawaii Five-O" fame, Traci's performance in *Love Bites* is more a case of "book them Danno!" rather than "book them." She may get the top billing in director Victor Nijiz's film, but her appearances are kept to a minimum until the very end when nurse Traci administers the kind of medicine that you won't find on the NHS (more's the pity!)

This is one of those rare hardcore pictures which actually possesses the merest hint of a plot - albeit an entirely outrageous one, peppered with some (almost) incisive wit and social



commentary.

Some stink jungle footage kicks off the first vignette in this anthology-styled opus as the lithe Ali Moore's profuse sweating is generated more by her masturbatory hand gyrations and sordid reading matter than any tropical heat.

Oblivious to her rhythmical pleasures, the scholarly Mortimer Stanley recounts a serious treatise on the "love-bite"

mosquito whose "periodic visitations" cause intriguing side-effects as bitten victims are "overwhelmed by irresistible sexual urges", only to "revel in the most active and shameless lust which is absolutely promiscuous" while "the imped on family and church life is shattering" - eat your heart out Mary Whitehouse!

It transpires that Mortimer isn't the only "missionary" in position though as



a well-endowed native - (yes, he could inscribe "welcome to Barbados and have a nice day" on his wedding tackle!), unleashes his own carnal passions on a delighted Ms. Moore - not quite living up to her character's name, Prudence!

The mosquito flights of fancy (fantasy) then segue into shots of nurse Traci and the good doctor - porno regular Harry Reems, inspecting a lake-water sample of the "love-bite" contagion. As expected, one of the pesky insects escapes with both Traci and Harry in close attendance, running after it and accompanied by "The Flight of the Bumble Bee" playing on the soundtrack!

It may not quite be David Cronenberg's sexual parasite thriller *Shivers* (1974), but the bug then proceeds to infect an apartment block, and in particular, the 11th occupied by Amber Lynn - who certainly can't be accused of "ambly" as she provides the kind of lift-

service you only find in Singapore hotels. If only *Love Bites* hadn't been released before Aerosmith's chart hit, "Love in an Elevator"!

The mosquito's next target is a meeting of the self-pontificating More Morality Corporation (shades of the decidedly real Jerry Falwell here maybe), where draconian measures, reactionary viewpoints and basically any anti-libertarian ethos are welcomed.

Unfortunately for the moralists, the "love-bite" bug proves too appealing as the chairman makes a grab for a man's "D" cup instead of his own ice cup and an orgy full of Eastern promise and Caligula-style decadence ensues, before the bug "turns the heat up" later for a couple of unsuspecting sun-worshippers.

Back to doctors and nurses we go though as Traci and Harry are both bitten, the precursor to some decidedly

**"clothing plummets quicker across the world than the English pound."**

Irregular hospital ward activities on the "stroke unit" as "open season" replaces "closed wards" - no wonder there's a shortage of hospital beds if this is what goes on behind closed screens!

Heroically to the "bitten" end, the good doctor still records his symptoms with the expected, "Take this down nurse" as a "tingling in the spine and the extremities overwhelms" him.

His final telephone calls - to the police, the fire-brigade, the FBI and finally - the President, are all met with excited, costal groans indicating that the "love disease" has now reached epidemic proportions - not so much "Black Wednesday" as "Bonk anyway" as clothing plummets quicker than the English pound.

*Love Bites* isn't quite a classic of cinema erotica despite these "sterling" efforts, but it is certainly an above average picture, retaining the kind of outrageous humour which titles such as *Pretty Peaches* are highly noted for, and Traci Lords has very definitely appeared in far worse films than this before her current "serious acting" renaissance.

## ZOMBIES - FILMS THAT CALL THE DEAD TO RISE

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# VENUS IN FURS

***A dream-like atmosphere, delirious music, not to mention Maria Rohm at her ravishing best, all add up to the finest film from the much-maligned Jess Franco.***

"Divine" or "heavenly" retribution may well serve as a subtitle for this particular epic from prolific Spanish director Jess Franco. The reason? The startling appearance throughout of the voluptuous Maria Rohm as the predatory, all-consuming "Wanda Reed" - the undisputed shimmering "Venus" of the title.

Although the much vilified Franco and his profuse oeuvre don't often elicit much in the way of fulsome praise *Venus in Furs* ranks high as one of his and the horror genre's most effective and onerous offerings.

It's a lyrical tale which largely dispenses with the somewhat abed (at the time, daring) source novel mixing art porno with S & M as supplied by Sacher Masoch, in favour of a more atmospheric, dream-like aura which envelops the characters and audience alike.

Though furnished with one of those perfunctory, "penny-dreadful" type scenarios, the film still manages to transcend these modest origins as we see a bewildered jazz musician Jimmy (James Darren), becoming mesmerised under the hypnotic gaze of Wanda. All the more perplexing as Jimmy can remember seeing her accidentally killed during a tamed orgy, in Istanbul no less, by a fashion photographer Olga (Margaret Lee) and her two decadent playmates, Kapp and Ahmed, played by horror alumni Dennis Price and Klaus Kinski.

All of this does little to explain Wanda's sudden reappearance, floating ghost-like in and out of various scenes much to Jimmy's bemusement. Her initial appearance, washed up on the shore, lures Jimmy into the madroom: he runs into the sea towards her stunningly glimpsed in hallucinatory slow-motion, as if time itself were standing still. Indeed when he gapes upon

Wanda's sunken features, her beauty ebbing away as if caught on the tide, he remembers, and time does momentarily, stop.

As he perceptively remarks, "When you don't know where you're at, time is like the ocean - you can't hold onto it."

Thus begins his forever-doomed pursuit of the "truth" given in often rather jarring, first person narrative which seems at odds with the more ethereal images on view.

As such, we are treated to such anachronistic gems as "a man it was a wild scene" and the present, "How can you run from a dead person unless you dead yourself." The answer it seems, is to escape Istanbul and ingratitude oneself with the carnival atmosphere of Rio and the carnal attributes of nightclub singer Rita (Barbara McNair).

Although Rita helps the beleaguered musician find his muse again, (cue for some sporadic snippets of great Manfred Mann jazz-rock numbers), Jimmy remains "haunted" by the continuing appearance of Wanda - the jovial, highly-charged festivity of the Rio celebrations doing little to dispel his doubts or melancholic mood.

Conversely, it seems to Jimmy that Wanda can be his only catharsis, even though he feels "trapped in a whirlpool, which keeps sucking (him) in deeper and deeper." Still more unattonable his existence becomes as again, slow-motion sequences herald his pursuit of Wanda, down a garden terrace, her fur-coated outline momentarily obscured by the shadows from the tree-edged path which also serve to (symbolically) cloud his mind.

Jimmy's "soft-focus" consummation of his "relationship" with Wanda is interrupted with "arty" shots as Franco's beloved use of the zoom lens makes an

appearance, taking across a gallery of nearby paintings as the bedroom air-dour intensifies.

This acts as the catalyst for the outrageous chain of later events as one by one, Wanda first enthralles those responsible for her death, materialising like some nefarious succubus to drain their life juices and leave them dead.

Of these, Price's death is rendered the most impressive - consumed by lust for her, he chases Wanda's tantalising image around his bedroom. Each glimpse of her fur coat, her silk stockings, her exposed flesh, serves to heighten the fetishistic eroticism inherent in the visuals, literally "climaxing" with a fatal heart attack/obscenism as the tormented Kapp expires.

Wanda's predatory, yet enticing image, (long pre-dating the powerfully attractive characters in *Fatal Attraction* and *Basic Instinct*), is often only partially glimpsed through mirrors - a self-revelatory vision as the culprits are asked to look upon themselves, their own souls and each question their complicity in Wanda's death.

Next victim is Olga, whom Wanda seduces during a private photo-session, leaving the dazed sufferer to slash her wrists whilst prone in the bath - the crimson water an echo of Wanda's own washed-up body on the shore. The circular theme is reinforced as following each killing, the requisite shots of crashing waves, indicating the first approaching tide (and Wanda's vengeance), about to engulf the guilty then segue into Rita's heartfelt retreat that "Venus in furs will be smiling, when that moment arrives" - the perfect coda.

An assortment of low-angled shots looking skywards at ancient towers and religious temples signals the reappearance of another icon as Wanda emerges

**" For those who showed no mercy, no mercy will be shown,  
For those who got their pleasures from the strangled cries  
and groans,  
The grins that filled their evil faces will be wiped for sure,  
Sometime, someone, somewhere will come knocking,  
knocking on your door ."  
" Venus in Furs will be smiling, when that moment arrives."**

back in Istanbul with Jimmy, where in a delirious sequence of increasing sexual tension, it is Kinski's turn to meet his maker - denied the loerent union with Wanda that he so covets. Once again, the final image is of the sedated Wanda spuming the human wreckage that she has left in her wake, casually trailing her fur behind her.

The singular absence of any police authorities is remedied as a mortified Jimmy is then informed by the local inspector that Wanda has been dead for two years.

Unable to reconcile this with the "very real" flesh and blood Wanda he has left sleeping upstairs, he escapes with her, only for Wanda to break away into a nearby cemetery. With masterly precision Franco is once again able to conjure up a cloying, ethereal atmosphere as coloured filters saturate the screen in a bold, kaleidoscopic display of greens, reds and blues, before he stumbles upon her deceased fur, and then, her grave.

Understandably traumatised by this, he reverts to the by now familiar stretch of coastline and, in a supreme moment of *deja vu*, sees a body lying in the water. The languid, stop motion photography enhances the timeless feel again as Jimmy now turns the body over only to discover that he is staring at himself, "Oh my god, it's me, I'm dead, I've been dead all the time", being the rather unhelpful response.

Given the relative paucity of the basic premise, this is probably the only "logical" conclusion to avail itself - however disappointing and inadequate it may appear.

In the final analysis, Franco has succeeded in creating a genuinely comic, dazzling work, a visual poem concerning infatuation and consuming sexuality coupled with a simply stunning score that not only complements the visuals, but embellishes them with subtle, and not too subtle, flourishes to further

stretch the imagination.

Franco shows that he is capable of creating a classic when given the necessary time and consequently, energy, to devote to one picture.

It's certainly fascinating to note the comments of Franco regular Howard Vernon who maintains that the ubiquitous Spaniard was held in mighty high regard by the legendary Orson Welles and that the equally celebrated Fritz Lang was fulsome in his praise of Franco's *Necronomicon*, (which Lang also regarded as a sex film - a genre he hated!).

It's fair comment that the mercurial Franco has never again scaled these vertiginous heights, though his recent *Faceless* did threaten some kind of renaissance, albeit in a limited form, but at least his ability has enabled him a momentary flirtation with greatness. For many other much vaunted "auteurs", even that has proved too formidable an achievement.



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